

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A HISTORIC CONTEXT OF MODERNISATION: ITS EFFECTS ON CHOICE-MAKING IN EDUCATION

MARIOS VRYONIDES

Abstract – *This paper examines the socio-historic roots of social capital in Cyprus. Social capital is seen as a major resource that can explain the unequal pattern of choices regarding post secondary school destinations. The application of social capital to accomplish social goals ('mesa' in Greek) is an 'institution' that has historically developed in Cyprus since the Ottoman era. This development has cultivated an 'ethos' of legitimacy in practices involving the utilisation of social connections and networks to achieve social aims among contemporary Cypriots. The above takes place within the context of a 'modernising' society where traditional and modern perspectives of how social relations are perceived co-exist and often are sources of social tension. The data presented are drawn from an empirical investigation, which used a mixed method approach combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a complimentary manner. The findings of the empirical study indicate that social capital appears to act as a hidden mechanism of social selection in modern Cyprus allowing some students, to make far reaching and daring decisions, whereas at the same time 'forcing' others, to make 'pragmatic' choices, which often mean making compromises in their ambitions to achieve social success.*

Introduction: choice-making in education

This paper examines the socio-historic development of a familial non-monetary capital: social capital, and the ways with which it influences processes of choice making for post school destinations. The family and its resources shape the immediate context, as well as the wider relations within which educational choices are made in modern Cyprus.¹ Family resources include a variety of entities and processes.² Primarily they consist of financial resources but they also include other non-monetary resources such as knowledge, social relationships and social connections that can be of potential use to provide access to social goods such as support, encouragement and access to opportunities for their expansion and application. Other non-monetary resources include the possession of the knowledge of how the educational system operates, the ability to engage successfully with it and the ability to cope with the demands of schooling.³ The

way family resources are used, invested or mobilised for making choices regarding post secondary school destinations is done in relation to different structural 'elements'⁴ that constitute for individuals and their families a space or a 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson, 1998, p.558). An individual's 'horizons for action' consist of the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990) that individuals and families form as part of their socialisation process but also by changing social structures that provide or restrict resources for utilisation to promote social objectives. *Habitus* is a cognitive system of preferences, a dispositional sense of action that 'directs' individuals to an appropriate response at a given situation. *Social capital* available to individuals and their families consists of a major determinant of the *habitus* of individuals and their families and facilitates their choice-making in education.

This paper begins by providing a definition of what the concept of social capital entails. It then moves to describe its historic development throughout the past century to its present form. Finally, it discusses how it influences the way young individuals and their families make their post secondary school choices drawing from an analysis of an empirical investigation of 404 secondary students and a sub-sample of 24 parents.

Defining social capital

Generally speaking social capital refers to social networks and the reciprocities that arise from them which, depending on where they are located, may produce outcomes for individuals at group or community level. Where positive, these outcomes emerge through involvement and participation in social networks. Like other forms of capital (economic, cultural), social capital makes possible the achievement of certain ends that would not have been possible without its presence as a resource, not only for individual and collective action, but also as a structural context with possible unintended consequences.

In the literature referring to the contemporary usage of the term social capital in the social sciences, one can easily distinguish three approaches among others. These come from Bourdieu (1986, 1990), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000). Social capital as used here is mostly associated with the works of Bourdieu (1977, 1986) and Coleman (1988). This approach is in agreement with Portes' (1998) assertion that the greatest theoretical promise of social capital lies at the individual level exemplified by the analyses of Bourdieu and Coleman but also in Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital as a 'private good'.

The first, most widely acknowledged, analysis of social capital comes from Bourdieu. He defines social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less

institutionalised relationships of mutual relationship and understanding' (1986). Social capital is not a natural given and is constructed and maintained through strategies involving the conversion of economic and cultural capital. All forms of capital are used to provide maximum accumulation of social profits. In other words, individuals need to actively strive to build and maintain their social networks through employing financial resources (economic capital) or cultural knowledge, language, taste, inclination, credentials, etc. (cultural capital). The amount and the quality of the social networks an individual can potentially mobilise are very important in the relative outcomes that they can offer. For example lower class networks may be as plentiful and varied as middle class ones, but less productive of socially and economically outcomes. Their differential 'profitability' lies in the 'quality' of the networks and the potential gateways to which they can offer access. For Bourdieu social capital is a form of capital, which, along with economic and cultural capital, determines an individual's social position and power. Through social capital individuals may gain access to economic resources (increase their economic capital) and also increase their cultural capital, for instance through contacts with experts or accessibility to institutions that confer valued credentials -institutionalised cultural capital.

Coleman (1988) defines social capital by its function. He states that social capital 'is not a single entity but a variety of different entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure' (1988, S98). From Coleman's perspective social capital is useful for describing the actions of actors in social systems. The denser and closer the relational ties in the system, the greater the likelihood that information that provides a basis for action will be communicated. For Coleman, as for Bourdieu, social capital is an individual asset but it is socially constituted and its value arises as an emergent property of the collective world, which is different from each of the other forms of capital. Baron *et al.* (2000 p.7) write that 'in much of his analysis, Coleman shared marked similarities with Bourdieu, including ... a concern for social capital as a source of educational advantage'. For Coleman the social capital that exists outside the family among parents and in parents' relations with institutions of the community has value for influencing the educational prospects of children (Coleman, 1988, S113). Using data from an empirical study with Catholic and private schools in the U.S. he showed that the presence of this latter form of social capital had positive influences in reducing the drop out rate among secondary school students.

A third approach that takes social capital at the community level is the one proposed by Putnam. According to Putnam (2000, p.19) social capital refers to connections among individuals (social networks) and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Social capital is different from other forms

of capital such as physical capital, human and cultural because it has an element which has been called ‘civic virtue’ which is an intrinsic element of a ‘healthy’ society, whereas the other forms of capital refer to properties of individuals. For Putnam social capital can be simultaneously a ‘private good’ and a ‘public good’. The different approaches to the term of social capital indicate, for Putnam, that ‘social capital has both an individual and a collective aspect’ (ibid.). Individuals form connections that benefit their own interests, one of the most important being finding a job and advancing in their careers. At the same time social capital has ‘externalities’ that affect the wider community. When the members of the community are well connected then the benefits for a well-connected individual would be greater than in a social context where the community is poorly connected (2000, p.20). Social capital is necessary for a healthy civic community to be prosperous and efficient.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) argues that the value of social capital as a concept lies in the fact that it identifies properties of social structure that are available to be used by actors to achieve their interests. From the definitions cited above it can be seen that social capital can be a social resource for individuals and at the same time it can be a collective social resource that may be mobilized to promote the general interests of the community. Rather than examining social capital at a community level, here social capital is examined as an individual/family resource that influences young people’s aspirations about their future and their choice-making regarding future educational and occupational outcomes. Social capital in Cyprus is a product of a history that spans more than a century. So, next the historic development of social capital in Cyprus is examined.

The development of an ethos for using ‘social networks’ to secure social profits

In this section the historic roots of using social networks to get access to social goods are examined. It is important to demonstrate the historic development of this ‘institution’ because it will make clear the cultural climate that is present in Cyprus today, which informs and influences the strategies that parents employ in an effort to maximise their children’s educational and occupational prospects. The use of social networks and connections to promote personal social objectives has also been referred to in Greek as using ‘*mesa*’.

The root of ‘mesa’: clientelism and patronage

The use of *mesa* can be viewed as a product of patronage and clientelistic relationships that have existed in Cyprus for a very long time. It dates back to the

Ottoman period when clientelistic relationships existed between people of different social status. This is often referred to as patronage. 'Real' patronage according to Gellner (1977, p.3) is 'a system, a style, a moral climate ... It is an ethos: People know that it is a way of doing things.' Clientelism and patronage are two terms used to mean similar things. Gellner (ibid.) describes patronage as follows:

'Patronage is asymmetrical, involving inequality of power ... it possesses a distinctive ethos; and whilst not always illegal or immoral it stands outside the officially proclaimed formal morality of the society in question.'

Similarly, Choisi offers a definition of clientelism (cited in Faustman, 1998) with particular reference to the case of politics in Cyprus. According to Choisi, clientelism is 'a reciprocal relationship between two persons or groups of persons of different social status in a small or traditional agricultural society.' On the one side we have the patron who provides money, posts, promotions and protection for his client, while he gains power, wealth and social prestige from the client who has to support, work and vote for his patron. Favouritism, nepotism, corruption and *rusfeti*⁵ are what characterise patron-client interaction. The client supports his patron politically in exchange for *rusfeti*.

There were many reasons that favoured the development of this kind of relationship between people. According to Gellner (1977, p.4) the incompletely centralised state, the defective market or the defective bureaucracy seems to favour patronage. It could be the case, however, that when a state is in the process of development and during this time remains unintelligible to a large part of the population, they would need brokers (lawyers, politicians or both) to obtain benefits. It could also be the case that when the state is a large or the main employer (or a prestigious employer, in the case of Cyprus) and brokers, such as politicians, bureaucrats and others, control (or influence) access to employment, people would be 'forced' to resort to using their social connections to access social benefits.

The historic source of clientelism: the Ottoman period

The historical roots of clientelism in Cyprus lay in the period of the Ottoman rule. The way the Ottomans ruled their provinces gave rise to the economic dependency of the peasants upon moneylenders. The Ottomans chose local clergymen or laymen to administrate and manage the villages and towns for them by collecting taxes and by resolving disputes within their communities. They gave these people much authority and power to carry out their duties. This was

particularly true for the Greek Orthodox Church in Cyprus. Part of the power that was granted to the Church was the power to allocate and collect taxes. Clerks were sent out by the Bishops to collect the money sometimes diverting money to their own pockets (Attalides, 1977, p.139). These people often became rich enough to lend money to their fellow villagers when in need in bad years and also to pay the various taxes. This ultimately increased dependency on the tax collectors themselves. This patron-client structure based on money lending according to Faustman (1998) was the main source of clientelism and became a common feature in all countries of the former Ottoman Empire, including Greece and Cyprus. Cyprus was then a traditional agricultural society whose Greek Cypriot community was dominated by a small elite of influential families and the high clergy. 'This small and closed society provided an ideal ground for patron-client relationships' (Faustman, 1998).

The British era

When Cyprus was taken over by the British in 1878 after almost 300 years of Ottoman rule, economic dependency of the peasants on the few rich moneylenders was an important element of the island's social and political life. Many of the peasants were often sued for their debts leading to either losing their land or imprisonment (Loizos, 1977). In the years that followed, however, this situation went through different phases. The British colonialists through the introduction of several economic measures and sometimes for their own political reasons tried to reduce this form of dependency. This economic dependency was often transformed by the Greek Cypriot elite to political dependency in an effort to promote anti-colonial and pro-Hellenic nationalistic ideals. During the British administration, an Elected Legislative Council was introduced in 1882. Election to the Legislative Council was an important means of consolidating power and prestige for a few Cypriot notables according to Loizos (1977). Many of the elected members in the Legislative Council were moneylenders, or landowners who were also moneylenders⁶ (*ibid.*). Choisi (1995) mentions that the Greek Cypriot ruling class not only managed to control the election behaviour of the population through the economic dependency but also could effectively isolate those who refused to submit to these social power conditions.⁷

Except from the above reason that made the British try to break this circle of dependency from early on, there was another reason that drove them to do so. The second reason must be attributed to their effort to transform the economic culture from a restraining situation that was holding down further development and modernisation to new forms of legal rationality, which was less personalistic. One of the first measures that the colonial government took was to reduce the

frequency of imprisonment for debt. Later, however, during the 1930's they introduced other more radical measures the most important of which was the establishment of co-operative credit societies in the villages and a co-operative central bank. These institutions helped to reduce the networks of clientelistic relationships based on money lending⁸ and consequently the influence of those power brokers within the Greek Cypriot community whose power was based on it.

After the influence of the old political rulers was substantially limited due to the economic measures taken by the British, a new potential source of clientelism emerged. After 1941 the constitutional system allowed for political parties to form freely.⁹ By this time the large electorate were no longer bound by the traditional clientelistic relationships that had become insignificant under British rule. However, despite the breaking of relationships based on economic dependency the British did not appear to break the clientelistic 'ethos' among those seeking favours and the perspective providers. At first the political parties had only limited power to distribute favours at an administrative level since the British controlled employment in the civil service and the state expenditure. This prevented them from creating clientelistic relationships on a large scale. They could only offer favours on a small scale at the level of municipal politics. The political parties became sources of new clientelistic relationships after the Independence in 1960 and the radical restructuring of the social order that was brought about in the Cypriot society.

The Independence period

By the end of the British rule (1960) clientelistic structures based on money lending had faded. According to Faustmann (1998), after Independence clientelistic structures re-emerged around the new power holders most of which were former EOKA¹⁰ fighters. The way that these new structures developed is very interesting because here lay the roots of the way contemporary social networks and connections began to be used to promote social objectives.

During the anti-colonial struggle EOKA created a powerful network, which was necessary for the organisation of its movement. These networks offered young people, most of whom came from rural or lower middle class backgrounds, the possibility for recognition and advancement. Despite the fact that the young EOKA fighters had not been part of the traditional elite they gained political power and influence. Bourdieu (1986, footnote14) argues that it is often the case that membership of a national liberation movement allows members to take advantage of redistribution of a proportion of wealth and the recovery of highly paid jobs. To these potential economic profits one could add the very real and immediate social

and symbolic profits that derive from membership of such a movement (accumulation of social capital.¹¹ Similarly, Coleman (1988) argues that it is likely that once an organisation is brought into existence for one set of purposes, it can also aid others, thus constituting the proliferation of social capital available for use in other contexts. According to Coleman there are several examples in many social contexts of organisations set to lay claims or to serve specific purposes but later served as social capital available to individuals to serve other goals. This was evident in the case of Cyprus with the creation of the EOKA organisation. The intense and tight networks and the relationships that were created by the Church and Greek Cypriot nationalists for the anti-colonial struggle served later as available social capital to those who participated one way or another in the movement. After the Independence the people who came into power under the leadership of the Greek Cypriot Archbishop, who became the first president of the newly established republic, used the social capital that was created to secure positions for themselves and for the member of their families in the general public sector. Many of the EOKA fighters who were actively involved in the struggle retained the title of *agonistes*¹² (fighters) even after the end of the struggle and many times capitalised on this title of distinction. It provided, among other things, access to social privileges as they enjoyed the support, and recognition of many Greek Cypriots. Government posts and senior posts in other public and semi-public institutions went to those that were leading members of EOKA. According to Christodoulou (1995), as most of them were of lower middle-class and rural backgrounds, this constituted a radical re-ordering of the social structure. In the first cabinet of 1960 and in the House of Representatives many members were leading EOKA members (Faustman, 1998). According to Loizos, 'when Independence started EOKA became briefly an informal duplicate government, and enabled patron-client relations, as well as weaker exchanges, to take place' (1977, p.127).

Finally, it must be noted that different 'forces' dominated different sections of the Independent state. For some sectors some politicians or agents were powerful whereas in others they were powerless to intervene. This gave rise to a mentality whereby people, in order to be successful in making use of this institution and have, according to Loizos (1977, p.127), a 'fighting chance', had to have as many options open as possible (friends, kin, fellow-villagers, parties, trade unions, etc.) and mobilise the appropriate social networks (if they had them) in order to achieve a certain goal. Part of the success in mobilising social networks, lies in the ability of individuals to maintain various kinds of social connections. This situation cultivated an 'ethos' of 'exploiting' any available social network to achieve social goals.

In the following decades the establishment and the strengthening of the party political system offered a significant source of social capital based on party

patronage. Many who actively belong to and support a political party expect that if at one point they require the assistance of their party to promote the interests of their family members they should get it. However, as was noted earlier, apart from social relationships based on political party patronage, there is a widely held perception that middle class families have access to effective social networks based on 'mutual recognition and understanding' that lower class families probably do not have. These connections tend to be more effective in relation to connections based on party patronage, for example, because of the kind of reciprocities that they generate. Middle class families would more likely be in a position to 'reciprocate' better benefits that they get from social connections because they would most likely have the means to do so (economic, cultural and social). It is at this level that the use of *mesa* is particularly effective when used to advance social goals such as favourable treatment for accessing state services or more importantly securing the occupational prospects of family members. It can be argued that the greatest advantage that they offer lies in the fact that they make possible the strengthening of a particular 'habitus' that potentially facilitates social action in decision-making in relation to future educational and occupational pursuits if one knows that their family is well positioned to enter an 'exchange process' in an environment where such practices are widely regarded as being extremely effective for social success.

To sum up we could say that those people who found themselves in power at the time of Independence, old and new political classes used their social status and influence to gain competitive advantage. They not only helped their own families but they established clientelistic relationships with people or groups seeking advantages and opportunities. Facets of this are of outstanding relevance and central to the contemporary usage of social capital for educational advantage. Namely, because there is, today, a very influential *modernist* attitude, which regards the process of offering and seeking access to social networks, as an anachronistic (and thus pre-modern) procedure to advance social goals and calls for meritocratic and transparent procedures.

Modernist and traditional approaches in the application of social capital

The Cypriot society is often seen as a society that progresses between two 'worlds' often in an ideological conflict with each other (traditional versus modern). These worlds signify different ideological perspectives and approaches in the everyday way of life of modern Cypriots. This had been the fundamental argument behind Argyrou's (1995) study of the way marriage is celebrated in modern Cyprus where he described this conflict as an ideological conflict between the different social classes who appear to adhere to a certain ideology in an effort

to appear affiliated with a particular identity that would distinguish themselves from the others. In this 'conflict' the middle classes are keen to be seen as endorsing an ideology that sees Western/European culture, values, institutions and practices as being modern, something that carries an underlying connotation of superiority, in contrast to lower social classes who appear to adhere more to traditional Greek Cypriot values who many view as anachronistic and backward. In everyday social and political life and discourse one frequently comes across incidences, which demonstrate this 'conflict'. During the past twenty or so years the introduction of many innovations and practices in social life has often been accompanied with the label of European (=modern) in an effort to be successfully introduced into the Cypriot society.¹³ The simplistic but often quite effective rationale behind this practice is that if Cypriots wish to be viewed as Europeans then surely they should adopt the practices and the institutions¹⁴ that are found in Europe. This, as was said earlier, had been the driving force behind the introduction of a number of modern innovations in Cyprus and has been intensified as Cyprus seems to be coming ever more closer to becoming a full member of the European Union.¹⁵

This ideological conflict should not be seen as causing polarising effects. What appears to be happening, is the emergence of a combination of elements of both traditions in the practices of most Cypriot families. In contemporary Cyprus one comes across an amalgam of traditional and modern practices concerning the application of *mesa* (social connections and networks) to achieve social objectives. The traditional attitude towards the use of *mesa* advocates that their use is a *legitimate* practice. Its legitimacy emanates from the fact that it has been historically embedded in the practices of Cypriots. This perspective sees the use of *mesa* as part of 'Cypriot' identity. The notion 'that is how we [Cypriots] do things' is used frequently by supporters of that view and expresses vividly this position. On the other hand the *modern* approach sees the use of *mesa* as an anachronism, as an outdated practice that holds the society back and that it constitutes an obstacle to the adoption of meritocratic procedures. The modernist position tends to identify itself with meritocratic procedures and calls for legitimacy through 'objective' and 'transparent' procedures. In fact, for the modernists, objectivity and transparency are fundamental qualities of meritocracy. Findings from the empirical study presented in the next section, have indicated that it is very difficult to associate a particular social group with one or the other perspective. For example there is a proportion of the middle classes that regards the use of social connections and networks as backward, anachronistic and pre-modern. Yet, when it comes to the 'cruel reality' (this was the way many parents in the empirical study described the reality of people seeking to mobilise networks and connections), the rhetoric against this institution is forgotten and these parents

clearly declared that they would resort to this resource because not doing so would deprive their children from the chance to compete on 'equal' grounds in a competitive labour environment. Willingness to resort (or not to resort for that matter) to the use of *mesa* is an element that had its consequences for the kind of choices that are taken for future educational and occupational destinations. The unequal way with which social capital becomes available for use between social classes acts as a selection mechanism that clearly favours some groups and disadvantages others. Thus, it constitutes one of the main sources of social injustice in Cyprus today and raises questions about the current state of social justice in Cyprus.

Social capital facilitating choice making in education: evidence from an empirical investigation

To investigate the way social capital influences the process of choice making in education we now turn to the findings from an empirical investigation carried out among students graduating secondary school in Cyprus in the summer of 1999 (Vryonides, 2003). Questionnaires were completed by 404 students attending all kinds of secondary schools in Cyprus in the Nicosia town and district namely public Lyceums with their different specialisations, public technical schools and English speaking private schools. Twenty-four parents from three social class groups (professional middle class *PMC*, lower middle class *LMC* and working class *WC*) were interviewed (see Table 1 for a summary of cases).

Students' expectations for receiving help from their families

Students' answers from the questionnaires relating to the kind of support that they expected their family to provide to them in order to materialise their occupational aspirations point to *social capital* as a primary potential resource. This consequently has implications for the kind of educational choices that students make. The students' responses indicated that 72.3 percent of them expected their family to help them to secure employment. The higher the family social class background of the students the more they expected help from their families (Table 2). The differences in the ways students responded to that question were significant. This was confirmed by the Kruskal-Wallis test, which showed that students' responses varied significantly in all three groups:

Chi-square = 6.727; df = 2; p<0.05

TABLE 1: The educational aspirations of students in relation to the familial social capital

TABLE 2: Students' expectations for getting help from their families

I expect my family to help me find employment...			
	YES	NO	TOTAL
1. PMC students	61 (83.6)	12 (16.4)	73 (100)
2. LMC students	113 (72.9)	42 (27.1)	155 (100)
3. WC students	118 (67.1)	58 (32.9)	176 (100)
TOTAL	292 (72.3)	112 (27.7)	404 (100)

PMC: Professional middle class

LMC: Lower middle class

WC: Working class

When students were asked, ‘How do you expect your family to help you find employment?’ their answers provided a clear link with familial social capital. Table 3 presents a summary of the different answers that the students gave. It can be seen that the most common answer (nearly half of the answers given) was the one that referred to the family’s social capital (social networks, connections, friends, acquaintances etc.) In total 102 answers pointed to help from sources directly connected to their family’s social capital (in terms of inter-familial networks) whereas other answers (Table 3) indirectly connected to other aspects of familial social capital (i.e. join family business, work with parents). Of the 102 responses directly associated with social networks and connections, 22 (nearly 20%) used words such as *meso* or *rousfeti*. The use of these words clearly point to the kind of social capital students and parents alike regard as being of the kind being mostly effective in the field of materialising occupational aspirations.

One other interesting point that may be made is that students from all social class family backgrounds were expecting help from their family’s social capital. The question is, however, which students have the best chances of successfully benefiting from that resource. This connects to the ‘quality’ of the networks available to different social class families and to the parents’ willingness to resort to the networks they associate themselves with. This is an issue that is explored below.

Familial social capital and choice-making in education

Social capital necessary to promote social goals referring to the future employment prospects of the children is not perceived as being equally available to all by the parents interviewed in the empirical study. In fact parents’ responses from the interviews indicated that both the ‘quantity’ as well as the ‘quality’ of

TABLE 3: Ways with which students expected their families to help them

I expect my family to help me...	PMC	LMC	WC	Total
1. With their connections/acquaintances	19	47	36	102**
2. Money/financially	7	6	15	28
3. Moral support	5	8	6	19
4. Join family business/work with parents	5	8	5	18
5. Guidance/advice	3	7	0	10
6. Help me look for a job	0	0	15	15
7. Not sure/Don't know	2	3	4	9
8. Other answers	7	16	16	39
TOTAL	48	95	97	240

* Note: These are numbers of answers and not of respondents. Some respondents cited two or in few cases more than two ways they expected their families to help them in their employment.

** Note: In 22 cases the words *meso* or *rousfeti* were used.

social capital differed substantially among the parents from different social classes. The family social capital takes a variety of forms and includes various social connections and networks with the extended family, parents' colleagues, personal friends and acquaintances etc. A strategy that many parents adopt is to try and create as many possibilities for using different social networks as possible to promote their interests. Even though networks based on the extended family, relatives of some kind and personal acquaintances are commonly used, the most acknowledged form of effective social networks is that with political parties and politicians in general (clientelism and political patronage). Also, equally effective can be social connections with high government officials or people holding important posts in the economic and social domains. Other sources of social capital can be the Church, trade unions etc.

Table 1 presents a summary of the kinds of networks parents associated themselves with which they thought could be beneficial for materialising the educational aspirations of their children. Other important issues that are also presented in the same table are: parents' perceptions of whether their social capital (ASC) could become available for use, their willingness to mobilise it (WSC) and the educational aspirations of their children (EDASP).

Gender and choice-making

During the interviews a gender pattern appeared in the relationship between educational aspirations and social capital. Parents' answers during the interviews

about whether their expectations were influenced by their children's gender reveal a picture that cuts across the social class division. Parents' social class did not prove to be distinctive in the pattern of answers. The parents could be roughly categorised into two main groups in terms of their attitudes to the role of gender in the choices made. On the one hand there is a group of parents who appear to adhere to a traditionalist position that advocates that men and women have a different position and 'purpose' within the society and as a result the choices that they make should reflect that. On the other hand there is a group of parents who seem to support a modernist position, which argues that there should not be different expectations of children on the grounds of their gender.¹⁶ Parents' attitudes in relation to gender had implications for the way parents 'utilised' their available resources (among which social capital) to facilitate their children's choice making. Let us look more closely into these different positions as expressed by parents.

Characteristic examples of the traditionalist position can be seen in the views of Mr Paris (*PMC 3*) and Mr Nikolaou (*LMC 9*) who expressed similar views.

Inter: Would you have different expectation if your child was a girl?

Mr Paris: Yes there is a differentiation in the choices of education and sector. But it is not a rule.

Inter: What would you personally have done if your child was a girl?

Mr Paris: It is a matter of character I think. That is if it's a son you push him towards your business activities. For a daughter I believe you put her on a different level. You see her tendencies and wishes as well. You are not so demanding of a daughter. Because, for the financial needs of a future family we still see that the weight still falls primarily on a man rather than on a woman. Anyway, a woman may contribute but the main responsibility is in the hands of a man. That is how we still see this ... so, the plans could be different for a girl.

(*Mr Paris, PMC 3*)

Inter.: Did the sex of your child play a role in the choices that you made?

Mr Nikolaou: Yes definitely. I would never send my daughter to become a Civil Engineer.

Inter.: Why not?

Mr Nikolaou: Not that it is bad, but it would sound strange to me. It would be one of the things that you rarely hear about... There is a difference between boys and girls. For a girl it doesn't matter if she earns £300 a month. It is a bonus for her family. The fewer qualifications she has the easier it is to get employment. She doesn't have the pressure that she should support a family. If she has her house [*he refers to the issue of dowry*]... For a son things are different. He cannot support a family with a salary of 300 and 350 pounds. I would not accept this for my son. The son is under a lot of pressure.

(*Mr Nikolaou LMC 9*)

The above parents' attitudes express a position that supports that male children have priority over female. And this is because, as this line of argument supports, there are more expectations from men at the end of their educational trajectories. This is something that is bound to make families who adopt this position to be willing to 'invest' more resources for male students. In the sample interviewed there were other examples of this position. Mrs Andreou's son (*LMC 10*) but not her daughter attended a private English-speaking private school and she and her husband had different plans for their children. For her son she said:

'Yes sending my son to the English school meant future studies in Britain but because he was a *son* and you think a bit differently ...'

Whereas for her daughter she commented:

'If she follows economics for me a Bank is ideal [*place for employment*] for a *woman*.'

Mr Simou (*PMC 7*) had this to say about the issue when talking about the fact that both his son and daughter followed primary school teaching. He seems to suggest that primary school teaching is more suitable for a daughter rather than a son.

'I honestly tell you I would prefer my son to choose something else, one other study to go and study abroad since he is a *son*. Now you will tell me: How about your daughter? She was an excellent student as well but ... she is a *daughter*.'

Mr Simou (PMC 7)

The above views reflect what might be characterised as traditionalist attitudes towards the role of men and women in society. That is that men should be in a position that they should have the responsibility of being the primary wage earners, whereas the financial contribution of a working-woman in a family is a bonus but not a necessity.

The parents who expressed 'modern' views on the issue more or less expressed the idea that even though in the past there might have been discrimination against women nowadays they would respond equally to both sons and daughters. It has to be said that these parents were the minority in the parents interviewed. Mrs Dimou's (*PMC 1*) comments are typical of the answers that these parents gave.

'I believe that it is unfair what some parents do ... to distinguish between boy and girl. I believe that parents should give the best educational provision to their children whether they are boys or girls.'

Mrs Dimou (PMC 1)

Another example is Mrs Litsa (WC 21) who expressed similar views towards giving the same opportunities to her daughter and she appeared determined to back her daughter to the highest levels of education.

Inter.: Up to what level of education would you be prepared to push your daughter?

Mrs Litsa: I won't deprive her if she wants to. If she succeeds in passing as a teacher, she plans to work for a few years and then study history or political science. She is telling us that she will be studying until she is 30.

Inter.: If your child was a boy would you have different expectations?

Mrs Litsa: I don't think so. It is not as it used to be some years ago when you would push the son higher and give priority to a son. I see all of them the same way.

Mrs Litsa (WC 21)

From the above it can be seen that in today's Cyprus there are different attitudes that connect students' gender with the various kinds of post secondary school destinations and, as will be shown next, with the way available social capital resources are utilised to facilitate (directly or indirectly) the process of educational choice making. At the same time it has to be said that the data from our study have not indicated that these differences in the way parents perceive gender roles affected female students' overall opportunities to move into higher education. Students' gender, though, affected the kind of strategies families developed to facilitate the educational choice making of their children. Among the strategies affected were the ones that connected to available social capital resources.

Familial strategies in relation to the availability/unavailability of social capital

The availability of social capital offers some families a sense of security for making ambitious educational choices. As can be seen in Table 1 the families who had available social capital (ASC) and were willing to resort to its support (WSC) were making choices such as Law, Business Law, Applied Mathematics and Engineering (*PMC 2, PMC 3, PMC 6, LMC 10, PMC 14*). These kinds of choices have the potential to lead to high status professional positions. In some cases it is highly likely that in order for such educational credentials to materialise in the Cypriot labour market they would require the support of social networks and connections. Hence, if these networks and connections are not perceived as being available to some families, different choices may have to be considered by them.

There are interesting observations that may be made in relation to the strategies that families employed to cope with the unavailability of social capital. Some middle class families appeared not willing to resort to the support of the kind of social capital needed for materialising their children's occupational aspirations. These families, though, appeared to be better able to cope with this 'disadvantage' than others. Basically, these families, due to their position, even though they could potentially access effective social networks were planning not to do so because they did not want to create outstanding obligations towards the various 'providers' of the required support. Thus, they were developing strategies that would allow them to avoid seeking the help of these networks. Among these strategies, one was the pursuit of high quality education (cultural capital in its credentialised form) with the help of their financial capital in the hope that the prestigious credentials gained would require minimum support from *mesa*. Alternatively, some families were opting for choices in areas where resorting to *mesa* was non-essential.

Mrs Dimou (*PMC 1*) is characteristic of parents seeking high quality education for their children. Specifically she talked of her family's plan to send her son to Britain to get what is widely regarded in Cyprus as prestigious education.

Mrs Dimou: ... we made it clear to him that whatever job he decides to do either on his own or with an organisation we will not be prepared to go and ask 'beg' anybody so that he is employed.

Inter.: Is that why he has to get the best credentials?

Mrs Dimou: Exactly.

Inter.: How do you see the employment prospects of a young person coming from studies today?

Mrs Dimou: It is difficult. Very difficult.

Inter.: Does this worry you?

Mrs Dimou: Yes it certainly does. Because you spend a fortune and in the end you are not sure if the money you spent will be paid back or not but ... I suppose money is not the issue ... the important thing is that he will feel capable to overcome *mesa*.... because, to tell you the truth, because he himself wouldn't want to beg he may not even come back to work in Cyprus after his studies.

Mrs Dimou (*PMC 1*)

However, resorting to the support of financial capital was not an option available to all. Other families saw as a way to avoid the need to seek the support of social networks and connections the pursuit of education that in the end would not require the help of *mesa* to produce employment opportunities. One such kind of education was school teaching (*PMC 5, PMC 7, PMC 8, LMC 9, LMC 10, LMC 13, LMC 15, LMC 16, WC 21, WC 24*). School teaching (particularly primary school teaching) has become a favourable higher education destination, especially

for female students, and it has been in demand for the past ten years or so among those who intend to pursue studies at Greece and at the University of Cyprus. This is often attributed to the fact that it is regarded as an occupation that offers prospects for immediate employment along with many other benefits (job security, relatively high earnings in relation to the private sector, etc).

For the working class families whose children indicated no intention to pursue higher studies, the lack of social capital was often accompanied by shortage of financial capital. These parents clearly indicated that they could not afford to send their children to higher education. Here one may make the assumption that for families who lacked social capital any investment in their children's education coming from a tight family budget would not be a 'sensible' investment. And this because such an investment would not offer any tangible prospects for future employment since there is a prevailing attitude that suggests that social networks and connections (*mesa*) is one of the most important elements for securing a 'good' job. So, for those working class families whose children intended to pursue higher studies, such as case WC 21, primary school teaching seemed to be one of their limited options. Mrs Litsa (WC 21) had the following to say:

'That is why all children want to become teachers. Because they feel that the only thing that if you manage to enter, there aren't any mesa, is to become a teacher. And then the competition is very fierce. And what kind of job is a teacher? It is not that important. My daughter has so much knowledge and ability that her teachers don't agree that she should go to become a teacher. Because she went to Practiko, she did not do Classics, because she likes those lessons. She should have gone into political studies. But who is going to help her from then on?'

Mrs Litsa (WC 21)

It can be argued that for some parents the lack of social capital entails making compromises, as to the level of education that their children might aim. The comments of Mr Nikolaou (LMC 9) are very telling.

'If my daughter has all the requirements, at least at a bank I should be able to get her employed. But if she goes for further studies it would be very difficult for me then because she would be aiming higher where the positions are limited. But for lower positions I don't think it would be very difficult for me.'

Mr Nikolaou (LMC 9)

For many working class parents resorting to *mesa* was not a realistic option. The unavailability of social capital was in most cases accompanied by shortages in other forms of capital (financial, cultural) (WC 17, WC 19, WC 20, WC 22).

Thus, the choices that these families were making portrayed a feeling of acceptance that their children's chances of succeeding in the labour market were limited. Some were expressing importune remarks such as: 'If we can get any kind of *meso* to help our daughter it would be more than welcomed' (WC 20). In comments such as the above, one may detect traces of fatalism transcending, which inevitably 'impose' on young people coming from such families a restricted horizon for educational choice making.

To sum up we could argue that there are different strategies to deal with the unavailability of social capital. It has to be said however, that middle class families appear to be better able to adopt compensatory strategies and to cope with this shortage compared with working class families. And this, because middle class families can draw support from other resources, primarily financial capital but also cultural capital in the sense that they appear to have a better understanding of educational processes and opportunities available that do not require the help of social networks. Moreover, there is a distinctive characteristic in some middle class families' lack of social capital. This 'deficiency' is the product mainly of their unwillingness to resort to the help of available social networks for various reasons (rejection of such practices, unwillingness to engage in processes that create outstanding obligations etc.) and not due to absence of social networks and connections. In any case, social capital offers to those who have it a sense of empowerment; it generates a *habitus* of security for making choices with better prospects. On the other hand, for those who lack it things are different. The unavailability of social capital generates feelings of helplessness about the future; a *habitus* of compromise and of setting lower aspirations. This is particularly true for lower class families who do not have many alternatives to consider because often they do not have alternative resources to draw support from.

Choice-making in relation to post secondary school destinations takes place within different 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, and Hodkinson, 1998). Social capital appears to be a fundamental part of each individual's horizons within the Cypriot social and cultural context. Cultural and social factors influence the nature of dispositions, which in turn both enable and constrain particular decisions through different horizons for action. Effective social capital, when present in ample amounts, not only constitutes a major recourse that facilitates educational choice but it also constitutes a compensatory resource or safety net against possible setbacks. On the other hand, for those who do not have it, it constitutes a serious impediment that restricts the opportunities to pursue social success. Either way it contributes to the formation of individual and collective *habitus* for choice making and thus affects the life chances of young individuals.

Conclusion

Education is deeply affected by intrinsic inequalities that are present in society which relate to the unequal distribution of various resources. Outside the family there are social dynamics and institutions that limit the opportunities of some families to take advantage of what the educational system has to offer. The social capital of the family, in the form of social networks and connections can provide the vital context for the educational credentials to be exchanged in the labour market for social positions. But these social networks have differential consequences for different families. This is happening for two reasons: (a) Social capital is unequally distributed among families in different social classes (b) The lack of social capital is dealt with more effectively by the middle classes in the sense that they have the possibility to adopt compensatory measures (by mobilising their cultural and financial capital) whereas families from lower classes do not have similar options to consider. The lack of social connections and networks compromises some students' ambitions and the aspirations that they may have for future educational plans.

Throughout the past century the use of social connections and networks has gone through many stages and developed accordingly. The 'ethos' of using social networks and connections to achieve social objectives has been deeply embedded in the cultural identity of many Greek Cypriots and it appears that they would continue to seek its utility in the short-term future. There is strong resistance, however, towards such practices by people who call for modern and rational practices to replace this traditional and anachronistic practice. These people, for instance, support that young people should aim for their preferred positions with the determining criterion being 'who they are' and not 'who they know'.¹⁷ In this way young individuals and their families from all social backgrounds will have the confidence that would allow them to make choices within extended 'horizons for action'. This would inevitably lead to the better utilisation of the resource that many regard as the primary source of prosperity for a country with limited natural resources: its people.

Marios Vryonides holds a primary teacher's degree from the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus (1992) and a Ptychio (BA) in Sociology from Pantion University, Athens (1996). He undertook postgraduate studies in England first at the University of Essex from where he earned an MA in Sociology with distinction (1997) and subsequently at the Institute of Education, University of London from where he was awarded a PhD (June, 2003). Address for correspondence: Eleftherias, 9, Kaimakli, Nicosia 1036, Cyprus. E-mail: mvryonides@ioe.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Notes

- ¹ When reference to Cyprus is made we will refer to the Republic of Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot community of the island. Since the Turkish invasion and occupation of the northern part of the country (1974) the two communities of the island have been forced to live separately. One hopes that the forthcoming entrance of Cyprus to the EU (May 2004) would prove to be a step towards the reunification of the island thus allowing future research to include the Cypriot population as a whole.
- ² The institution of the family in its 'traditional' form is considered to be very cohesive. This was shown in the empirical part of a PhD study whereby in a sample of 404 families 94% consisted of families where both parents were present in the household (Vryonides, 2003).
- ³ The ability to cope and make use of the educational system is viewed in sociological rather than psychological terms.
- ⁴ Structural elements constitute the cultural and social environments within which individuals are located.
- ⁵ *Rusfeti* comes from the Turkish word 'rusvet' which means the favourable treatment by a ruling party of its supporters/clients in exchange for the clients' support or services.
- ⁶ This is something that was noted by Governor Storrs who was in office from 1926 to 1932 in his report of the Legislative Council (Loizos, 1977, p.116).
- ⁷ For a detailed analysis on the issue of the Greek Cypriot elite- its function and legitimisation see Choisi (1995).
- ⁸ Among other measures that the British took to limit the clientelistic relationships based on money lending was the establishment in 1940 of a 'Dept Settlement Board' and 'Rural Debtors Courts' which enforced fairer interest rates on old debts. For a detailed analysis of clientelism under the British rule see Faustman (1998).
- ⁹ After 1941 the restrictions in political liberties imposed following the 1931 uprising began to relax.
- ¹⁰ EOKA, (Ethniki Organosi Kyprion Agoniston = National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) was the nationalist organization that carried out the anti-colonial struggle from 1955 to 1959.
- ¹¹ Of course in the case of Cyprus it is widely accepted that these profits for the EOKA members came without being the initial goal of EOKA members. The primary goal of the EOKA movement was ENOSIS (Union of Cyprus with Greece).
- ¹² This is a title being used even today 40 years after the end of that struggle.
- ¹³ Some would argue that the label 'European' replaced the label 'English' although it has to be said that for many middle class people the two are inseparable as to most Cypriots the most familiar impression of Europe relates directly to Britain, possibly because of the colonial legacy and the special ties that have been retained with the former colonial ruler or to the use/adherence of British symbols and practices as distinction signs. This must be seen within the context of what has been often characterized as Anglophilia of a part of the middle class, which regards everything English as superior. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that many innovations and institutions were often 'transplanted' into Cyprus from the West often, as Attalides (1993) remarks, without proper social critique 'imposing' thus an impression that their legitimacy/superiority lies in their origin

(England/Europe). Also, Argyrou (1993, pp.171-183) argues that Modernity, Europe and the West have emerged as the primary idioms through which a series of relations of symbolic domination have become legitimized in Cypriot society.

- ¹⁴ Examples include a variety of issues affecting many aspects of everyday life, from these of public transport, to parking practices, environmental issues and many more.
- ¹⁵ Under the Treaty of Accession signed in Athens on April 16th 2003, 10 European countries including Cyprus will become members of the EU on May 1st 2004.
- ¹⁶ There were, of course, those who were advocating for one position but in practice doing the opposite.
- ¹⁷ The leading expression of this approach has been passionately advocated by the newly elected president of the country.

References

- Argyrou, V. (1995) *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Attalides, M. (1977) 'Forms of peasant incorporation in Cyprus during the last century.' In E. Gellner & J. Waterbury (eds) *Patrons and Clients*. London: Duckworth.
- Attalides, M. (1993) 'Factors shaping the Cypriot society post independence.' In *Cypriot life and Society from Independence until 1984*, Nicosia: Nicosia Town Municipality. (in Greek)
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital.' In J.G. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Choisi, J. (1995) 'The Greek Cypriot elite - its social function and legitimisation.' *The Cyprus Review*, Vol.7, pp.34-68.
- Christodoulou, D. (1995) 'Life chances in cyprus: occupational and social structures and mobility viewed in perspective.' *The Cyprus Review*, Vol.7, pp.7-33.
- Coleman, J.S. 1988. 'Social capital and the creation of human capital.' *American Journal of Sociology*, 94/Supplement, S95-S120.
- Faustmann, H. (1998) 'Clientelism in the Greek Cypriot community of Cyprus under the British rule.' *The Cyprus Review*, Vol.10, pp.41-77.
- Gellner, E., (1977) 'Patrons and clients.' In E. Gellner & J. Waterbury (eds) *Patrons and Clients*. London: Duckworth.
- Hodkinson, P. (1998) 'The origins of a theory of career decision-making: a case study of hermeneutical research.' *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 24, pp.557-572.
- Hodkinson, P. & Sparkes, A.C. (1997) 'Careership: a sociological theory of career decision-making.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol.18, pp.29-44.
- Loizos, P. (1977) 'Politics and patronage in a Cypriot village, 1920-1970.' In E. Gellner & J. Waterbury (eds) *Patrons and Clients*. London: Duckworth.
- Putnam, P.D. (1995) 'Bowling alone: America's declining social capital.' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.61, pp.65-78.
- Putnam, R.D. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon Schuster.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. (1997) 'A social capital framework for understanding the socialisation of racial minority children and youths.' *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol.67, pp.2-39.
- Vryonides, M. (2003) 'The Role of Social and Cultural Capital in Choice-making for Post Secondary School Destinations: The case of contemporary Cyprus.' Unpublished PhD thesis, London: Institute of Education, University of London.